

## P. PREFACE



*This Preface lists the lead agencies and their contact information, provides background on the National Environmental Policy Act, explains how the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) will be used, and describes the organization of this Final EIS. A brief history of the project is included along with an update on activities since the Draft EIS was prepared.*

### P.1 LEAD AGENCIES, COOPERATING AGENCIES, AND PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

The lead agencies for this project are the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the North Carolina Turnpike Authority (NCTA). In the Draft EIS, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) also was listed as a lead agency. On July 27, 2009, Session Law 2009-343 was signed, transferring the functions and funds of the NCTA to the NCDOT, and the NCTA became a division of the NCDOT.

The following individuals may be contacted for additional information concerning this Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS). Comments and questions may also be sent to the project's email address: [gaston@ncturnpike.org](mailto:gaston@ncturnpike.org).

#### **Federal Highway Administration**

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#### **North Carolina Turnpike Authority (a Division of NCDOT)**

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The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is a cooperating agency. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) was invited to be a cooperating agency; however, the FERC provided no response, so they automatically are a participating agency. The following agencies are participating agencies:

- US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

- NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources Division of Water Quality (NCDWQ)
- NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC)
- NC Department of Cultural Resources State Historic Preservation Office (HPO)
- Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (GUAMPO)
- Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization (MUMPO)

The cooperating and participating agencies are identified in the *Gaston East-West Connector Section 6002 Coordination Plan* (NCTA, October 2008), prepared in accordance with Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). The *Section 6002 Coordination Plan*, included in Appendix A-7 of the Draft EIS, describes agency roles and public and agency participation in the planning process.

SAFETEA-LU promotes more efficient and effective Federal surface transportation programs by focusing on transportation issues of national significance, while giving State and local transportation decision makers more flexibility for solving transportation problems in their communities (FHWA Web site: [www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/summary.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/summary.htm)). Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU provides provisions affecting the timely delivery of the environmental review process and the completion of environmental impact statements (FHWA Web site: [http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/wizard/wiz\\_provisions.asp](http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/wizard/wiz_provisions.asp)).

## **P.2 HOW THIS FINAL EIS WILL BE USED**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, requires federal agencies to consider the potential environmental consequences of their proposals, document their analyses, and make this information available to the public for comment prior to project or program implementation (FHWA Web site: <http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/projdev/index.asp>).

This document will be used by FHWA as the basis for the Record of Decision (ROD), which is the final document prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The Record of Decision (ROD) identifies the Selected Alternative corridor and presents the basis for the decision. It should be noted that the ROD identifies a corridor, not a specific design. The preliminary design for the Preferred Alternative presented in this Final EIS may change during final design activities occurring after the ROD, provided the modifications are within the Selected Alternative corridor.

The FHWA NEPA process allows transportation officials to make project decisions that balance engineering and transportation needs with social, economic, and natural environmental factors. During the process, a wide range of partners (including the public, businesses, interest groups, and agencies at all levels of government) provides input into project and environmental decisions (FHWA Web site: <http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/projdev/pd3tdm.asp>).

## **P.3 ORGANIZATION OF THIS FINAL EIS**

This Final EIS uses a “condensed” format, as described in the FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A, *Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents* (FHWA Web site: <http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/projdev/impTA6640.asp>). This approach avoids repetition of material from the Draft EIS by incorporating by reference the Draft EIS, and instead allows the focus of the Final EIS to be on important changes that have occurred since the

Draft EIS, comments received on the Draft EIS and responses to those comments, and new information that has been considered.

As described in the Technical Advisory, the “crux of this approach is to briefly reference and summarize information from the draft EIS which has not changed and to focus the final EIS discussion on changes in the project, its setting, impacts, technical analyses, and mitigation that have occurred since the draft EIS was circulated.” The Draft EIS, incorporated by reference, is available for download on the NCTA Web site ([www.ncturnpike.org/projects/gaston](http://www.ncturnpike.org/projects/gaston)) and is included as a CD with all hard copies of the Final EIS.

This Final EIS is divided into eight sections, as described briefly below:

- **Chapter P** is this Preface.
- **Chapter PC** lists the special project commitments that NCTA has agreed to implement for the Preferred Alternative.
- **Chapter 1** provides a summary of information presented in *the Gaston East-West Connector Administrative Action Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (April, 2009), including the purpose and need and the alternatives considered. This section also contains minor corrections (errata) (a list of all errata is included in **Appendix A**), clarifications, and updates to information in the Draft EIS not specific to the Preferred Alternative. These include, but are not limited to, updates to the existing environment and an update to background information on mobile source air toxics.
- **Chapter 2** describes the Preferred Alternative and the reasons it was selected. This chapter also describes additional design work, other studies conducted for the Preferred Alternative, and updates to impacts associated with the Preferred Alternative that have been prepared since the Draft EIS.
- **Chapter 3** details continued coordination efforts with the public, as well as federal, state, and local agencies, since the Draft EIS was issued for public review. Substantive comments on the Draft EIS and responses to those comments are also included. All comments and responses are included in **Appendix B**.
- **Chapter 4** lists the principal participants in the preparation of this Final EIS.
- **Chapter 5** contains the distribution list for this Final EIS.
- **Chapter 6** includes the references and supporting documentation used in the preparation of this Final EIS. **Chapter 6** also includes a list of acronyms found throughout this Final EIS.

The Final EIS also includes appendices that are referenced throughout the document. The Final EIS, including figures and appendices, is available for download on the NCTA Web site ([www.ncturnpike.org/projects/gaston](http://www.ncturnpike.org/projects/gaston)). The supporting documentation listed in **Chapter 6** is comprised of technical memoranda and reports incorporated by reference into the Final EIS. This reference material is available for review upon request, with most documents also available on the NCTA Web site.

Note that throughout the Final EIS, references to sections, tables, figures, and appendices included in the Final EIS are in bold text, while references to these elements from the Draft EIS are not in bold text.

## P.4 HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

Plans to improve east-west mobility in southern Gaston County through construction of a new location roadway have been discussed by the GUAMPO since the late 1980s. The NCDOT began planning for the Gaston East-West Connector in 2001. NCTA's involvement began in 2005, with the adoption of the project by the NCTA Board as a candidate toll facility.

## P.5 ACTIVITIES SINCE THE DRAFT EIS

The *Gaston East-West Connector Administrative Action Draft Environmental Impact Statement* was signed on April 24, 2009 and made available for public and agency review on May 1, 2009 on the NCTA Web site. Copies of the document were distributed to public review locations and agencies May 11-13, 2009. The public comment period for the Draft EIS ended on July 21, 2009.

**Public and Agency Coordination.** Coordination efforts with the public and federal, state, and local agencies since the Draft EIS are summarized in **Chapter 3**. Four Pre-Hearing Open Houses and two Corridor Design Public Hearings were held June 22-25, 2009.

The NCTA conducted regularly scheduled agency coordination meetings throughout the project development process. These Turnpike Environmental Agency Coordination (TEAC) meetings were held to review the status of the current NCTA projects, to discuss and agree upon study methodologies, and to discuss and resolve environmental concerns and adherence to permitting requirements. For the Gaston East-West Connector, these meetings also included discussion of NEPA/404 Merger Process Concurrence Points (**Section 3.2**). Concurrence Points 1 (Purpose and Need), 2 (Detailed Study Alternatives), and 2a (Bridging and Alignment) were achieved prior to the Draft EIS. Concurrence Point 3 (Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative) and Concurrence Point 4a (Avoidance and Minimization of Impacts to Jurisdictional Resources) were achieved after the Draft EIS and prior to publication of the Final EIS.

**Updates and Refinements to the Preferred Alternative.** Refinements were made to the design of the Preferred Alternative based on input received from state and federal agencies and the public. Refinements include a 20-foot reduction in the median, the elimination of the Bud Wilson Road interchange, reconfiguration of five other project interchanges (Robinson Road, NC 274 (Union Road), NC 273 (Southpoint Road), Dixie River Road, and I-485), and further consideration of potential service road locations. These are described in **Section 2.3**.

**Additional Studies.** Several additional studies were prepared for the Preferred Alternative, including the following:

- Service Road Study (**Section 2.3.2**)
- Year 2035 Traffic Forecasts (**Section 2.3.5**)
- Traffic Operations Analysis based on 2035 Forecasts (**Section 2.3.5**)
- Traffic Noise Study Addendum (**Section 2.5.2.1**)
- Updated Hazardous Materials Study (**Section 2.5.2.6**)
- Phase II Intensive Archaeology Survey (**Section 2.5.3.2**)
- Conceptual Mitigation Plan (**Section 2.5.4.4**)
- Quantitative Indirect and Cumulative Effects Analysis (**Section 2.5.5**)